

Hegel on Second Nature in Ethical Life:

Response to Dean Moyar and Mark Alznauer

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Introduction

Many thanks to Mark Alznauer and Dean Moyar for their generous, insightful, and challenging comments. I am grateful for and amenable to many of their suggestions. Instead of going through each of their questions one by one, I will try to combine a few and address them together. First, I will begin with a brief introduction to the book and an explanation of how its subject matter unfolded. Second, I will address those questions having to do with ethical rules and moral theories. Third, I will address those questions having to do with Hegel's method, specifically the bridge between the *Logic* and the *Philosophy of Right*. And fourth, I will speak to the role of immanent critique, religion, and conscience.

The book began as an effort to understand Hegel's reasons for privileging unreflective forms of social participation, specifically habit and custom, in his account of ethical life. This seemed at first glance to be a relatively minor topic when compared to the more well-known features of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, such as his account of institutional spheres like civil society, and of freedom more generally. But what I discovered in the process is that habit and custom bear on many other aspects of ethical life, including civil society and freedom. In fact, getting clear about their place in ethical life brought me to rethink Hegel's entire project in the *Philosophy of Right*.

His remarks about habit and custom – such as §151 of the *Philosophy of Right*, which was my starting point – usually fell under readers' radar, at least at the time when I began thinking about the topic, though interest in it has significantly increased in recent years. Those who did notice them usually noted Hegel's Aristotelian heritage, explaining Hegel's reference to habit as his agreement with Aristotle that well-adjusted social participants are going to take pleasure in the right sorts of things, which habituation is supposed to accomplish. This role of habit seemed innocuous enough and did not raise many worries, for it did not seem difficult to accept that it is probably better that people also enjoy performing the duties associated with their

roles. In any case, it did not seem to require accepting the stronger claim – which I think remarks such as §151 do suggest – that it is indeed better that people perform those very roles habitually, as a matter of habit.

There was, however, a growing sense that Hegel’s references to habit point to an ambivalence at the core of ethical life, captured in the phrase “second nature.” We acquire a second nature by engaging in certain sorts of activities, and what we acquire when we acquire a second nature is itself a product of human effort. This makes habit a “second” nature, the work of freedom. But a second nature resembles “nature” to the extent to which habit becomes something fixed, static, repeated without deliberation, and hence something detached from one’s intellect or will. This seeming ambiguity between freedom and unfreedom expressed in the phrase led to the relatively standard verdict that habit needs to be surpassed, supplemented, or perpetually criticized, in order to avoid the danger of a mindless perpetuation. This is the feeling of unease that my book tries to dispel. I argue that Hegel is not ambivalent about the role of habit (and custom) in ethical life, as long as these are understood in the right context.

One of my main claims is that the habit of the ethical, which is the habitual performance of one’s social roles, is actually a perfectly adequate expression of freedom, specifically subjective freedom, which here means the freedom to do what I see as good, to act in accordance with my convictions. I suggest that there is even an intimate connection between habit and subjective freedom, since I can only be said to be genuinely convinced that a certain principle is good, worth upholding, if I have the corresponding habit of heeding it. This is not to deny that we can also develop bad habits, that some habits are simply ethically neutral, and that habit can also devolve into “mere habit”. What I wanted to challenge was the assumption that there is something suspect about habit in virtue of its form. I show that habit is not only an adequate, but it is in fact the best expression of subjective freedom so understood.

That said, I also acknowledged that Hegel’s conception of social participation is not fully captured by this account of habit, since there are also more overtly reflective ways of relating to ethical life that are appropriate under certain circumstances. So my interest in the unreflective aspects of ethical life led me to reconstruct many other aspects of his *Philosophy of Right* in its light – the role of culture and cultural participation, the exercise of critical reflection about practices and their underlying norms, and finally philosophical comprehension itself. I chose to include the phrase “second nature” in my title because I saw it as encompassing this range of

topics, foregrounding, for example, that ethical life is a product of work, that it must be inhabitable to those tasked with perpetuating it, and that our participation in it (when it is functioning properly) is for the most part spontaneous, effortless, and unproblematic.

But this is clearly not always the case. So another part of my project was to bring into view situations that call for a critical stance and to consider the broader question of how open Hegel's account is to social criticism. What I suggested is that assessing the place of critical reflection in ethical life involved assessing the prospect that such situations will continue to arise, situations marked by *contradiction* that undermine unreflective forms of social participation. And this required going beyond Hegel's official text. Even if the *Philosophy of Right* is not read as debilitating or discouraging critical reflection, it does not discuss very many contradictory occasions that have the power to call for more radical forms of criticism.

It was also important to me to show that Hegel's own philosophical reconstruction of ethical life makes a very poor model for social criticism, since it is not meant to be critical – at least not of ethical life. In this regard I depart from readings of Hegel's project in the *Philosophy of Right*, which take it to be an early paradigm for a “critical theory” of society. But if it is not a critical theory of society, I had to offer an alternative interpretation of Hegel's method. What I argue, in short, is that Hegel's philosophical reconstruction of ethical life is, surprisingly, both normative and quietistic, because its aim is to show that we can and should trust our ordinary forms of proceeding within ethical life. This required laying out a fuller picture of pre-philosophical social participation, and hence of what it is involved in inhabiting ethical life as a second nature, on Hegel's behalf.

Theories and Rules

In Alznauer's helpful reconstruction of my argument, he points out that Hegel (on my reading) rejects moral theorizing, and that he does so not just because it is idle and needless, but because there is something misguided about it. So his first question is *why* Hegel believes this to be the case. One option would be to say that Hegel, similarly to McDowell, holds that ethical knowledge cannot be codified and that it is this that makes moral theorizing misguided, since the aim of moral theorizing is to identify some set of rules to guide judgment and action. But as Alznauer points out, this option is not available to me, since I argue that ethical knowledge is for Hegel codifiable. I take as my evidence Hegel's position in the domain of positive law,

according to which custom and habit can be translated into a law-like form without losing their rich content, although doing so need not come at the cost of following the law habitually or customarily.

Both Moyar and Alznauer find the conclusions I draw from this to be puzzling. As Moyar asks: is this not to ascribe to Hegel an “ethical legalism” that is unsupported by the text, which does not offer any codification of such rules, laws, or principles that are meant to guide judgment and action? And as Alznauer asks: why do I also argue that rules can only be genuinely known by someone who follows them habitually, if I am at the same time insisting that this knowledge is codifiable? To use Alznauer’s example: “If our paradigm for ethical knowledge is a general principle like ‘don’t break contracts,’ then are we supposed to think that as someone loses the habit of conforming with his contractual obligations, he is somehow losing *knowledge* of that general principle?” So let me take this opportunity to clarify this relationship between rules, habits, and knowledge.

To address Moyar’s question first, I am trying to make sense of Hegel’s idea that knowledge of what to do is a function of looking to the requirements of roles. As Hegel emphasizes, it is not difficult to find out what I ought to do in a rational social order because this is prescribed by the relevant role. And I suggest that roles come with a *code*, though it is often an informal one, and so significantly different from a legal code whose breach warrants punishment. Although Hegel is acutely aware that enacting this code requires the exercise of judgment and thus a sensitivity to the specific circumstances, he is extremely reluctant to liberate this judgment from all rule-like constraints, because this would grant too much to individual discretion. In other words, Hegel rejects the ideal of moral expertise, according to which acquiring ethical knowledge involves becoming an expert judge in ethical matters. He thinks that judgment is important, but constrained by something universal and universally intelligible: a more or less explicit, more or less formal code that can be articulated as such, as a set of rules or principles.¹

The reason Hegel does not include such a code in his text and does not provide a list of rules or principles is because he thinks that it is, just like positive law, simply too contingent on

¹ I should note that I am not saying that we always conceive of this code as a code when we are following it, only that it *could* be so conceived, if need be. I think my view is compatible with Moyar’s claim that the universality of principle is only a moment in deliberation. In fact I emphasize that when we have made a habit of following this code, it plays no explicit role in deliberation at all.

changing circumstances. Two examples he gives in the Preface are Fichte's argument that a passport ought to include a picture of the person whose passport it is, and Plato's argument that nurses ought to rock babies back and forth. While both of these might be perfectly good principles under specific conditions, and hence suitable codes of conduct for the roles of citizen and nurse, this is not something for philosophy to adjudicate. So Hegel can hold both that ethical knowledge is codifiable *and* that this code must be so context-sensitive that it makes little sense to try to incorporate it into a philosophy of right, which is supposed to be able to distinguish between that which is essential to ethical life and that which is ineradicably changeable in it.

To turn to Alznauer's question, if I place so much significance on rules and principles, why do I also say that ethical knowledge is achieved only by those who have a habit of following them? What is the relevance sense of knowledge here? One familiar alternative would have been to say that knowing rules involves knowing how to apply them and that this "know-how" is something that only the habit of applying them can yield. But while this is probably true, it was not the sense of knowledge I had in mind. Rather, I was interested in what it takes to know that the rule is good and I suggested that one thing that it takes to know that a rule is good is to be convinced that it is good. So it is this conviction, often tacit or implicit, that I think only the habit of following the rule can definitively demonstrate, since it is this habit that proves that I am genuinely committed to its adherence. Being convinced that a rule is worth following goes beyond understanding what would count as following it, which even someone who is not convinced of its goodness can do. So, in what sense does someone who begins to break contracts no longer *know* the rule "do not break contracts"? Well, in the sense that this person's conviction has faltered.

Let me return to the opening question – what are Hegel's reasons against moral theorizing? – and consider the second option available to Hegel, which Alznauer identifies as Bernard Williams'. As Alznauer notes, I am sympathetic to this comparison between Hegel and Williams, though my sympathy lies elsewhere than Alznauer suggests. What Alznauer stresses is that Williams thinks our practices of blame cannot withstand reflective scrutiny because they are based on Nietzschean fictions that work only as long as they remain unexposed. But the aspect of Williams that I find more relevant for my purposes is that moral theorizing impoverishes the evaluative resources available to social participants because it leads them to seek one master-principle from which all others are to be derived, or through which all others are

to be justified. This is something that Hegel, like Williams, opposes, for Hegel thinks that different domains of social life are going to operate according to significantly different principles.

So one reason against moral theorizing is that ethical life is always richer, more varied and internally differentiated, than a moral theory can hope to capture. As we have seen, it includes many highly context-dependent codes of behavior, which can be better or worse, given their context, but which cannot be evaluated in a context-independent way. But as Alznauer rightly notes, the even deeper problem is that every principle at work in ethical life is in a certain respect context-dependent, because no principle relevant to it is self-legitimizing in abstraction from all empirical considerations. Even such principles as “obey contracts” and “respect private property” – which Hegel thinks are, unlike “carry a passport photo” and “rock babies back and forth,” essential to ethical life – can only be evaluated in light of the practices to which they give rise.² This means that the main reason against moral theorizing, at least in the way it has been traditionally conducted, lies in Hegel’s method. To cite Alznauer, “the basic thought [I attribute] to Hegel is that no principle can be deemed rational or binding unless it can be actualized, or consistently enacted, and that this is something that can be only be known from an empirical analysis of historical reality.”

Logic and Right

Next, I want to turn to those questions concerning my interpretation of Hegel’s philosophical method. One big issue haunting Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* is its relation to the *Science of Logic*. Although some interpreters have treated the *Philosophy of Right* as a self-standing treatise in moral, social, and political philosophy, others have made a convincing case that its central concepts presuppose the analysis Hegel has given of them in the *Logic*. A familiar example is Hegel’s concept of “actuality”. Readers used to wrongly assume that Hegel’s infamous *Doppelsatz* – that “what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational” – is meant to be vindication of the status quo, whereas Hegel’s account of “actuality” in the *Logic* shows that the term refers to something much narrower than whatever happens to be in place. Actuality is that which has actualized its concept, so which has met the standard appropriate to it.

² Alznauer is right that “actualizability” could be interpreted as too broad to serve a test, since a principle might be actualizable in France, but not in Spain, making it in an inappropriate principle to which to hold the Spanish. In the book I discourage seeing “actualizability” as anything akin to a test that can be implemented any place, any time.

This means that there will be much in social life that will fail to count as actual and so will fall outside of Hegel's philosophical reconstruction. Hegel's own example is the corrupt state, which would not be an actual state, although it exists in abundance. It also means that, while the *Doppelsatz* is true by definition, it has a methodological purpose because it restricts the subject matter of a philosophy of right to that which has proven actual, hence rational. This is the version of the methodological reading that I outline and defend.

My reading of Hegel's method is intended to explain how Hegel can have it both ways, how he can connect the *Philosophy of Right* to the *Logic* and still consider it self-standing. I try to do this by taking seriously his metaphor of a "circle of circles," which suggests a bigger system that consists of "sciences" that are relatively self-enclosed, though they glean their starting point from each other. I accept Alznauer's point that it is perfectly compatible to say that the concept of right, for example, is the result of another science which legitimates it as the starting point, but that this concept is only binding on individuals under certain social conditions, so that it requires ethical life for its actualization. In short, a philosophy of right could have inherited the concept of right from another part of Hegel's system, and yet still be faced with its own distinct task of showing that this concept has a legitimate place in ethical life.

But I also argue that, given the metaphor of a circle, Hegel thinks that it does not matter where we start, which concept or principle of ethical life we take as our point of departure, because we will always arrive at the same conclusion – that this concept or principle presupposes ethical life and is only actual in its context. Alznauer asks me whether this is not to neglect a *necessary* feature of Hegel's method, which always proceeds in roughly the same order, from abstract to concrete, irrespective of domain. As he puts it, "if *all* of Hegel's sciences proceed in this manner, which she herself seems to concede, then it seems quite unlikely that Hegel does not have a more general reason for proceeding from abstract to concrete." Here I want to make two brief suggestions for how to explain the order in which Hegel consistently proceeds. First, the cultural diagnosis that I offer to explain the starting point in the *Philosophy of Right* could easily be extended to the other sciences, since Hegel thinks that abstraction is a mark of his age and that this makes the most abstract concept or principle also the one that is most readily available to reflective thought. Second, I think Hegel has an enduring concern for completion. He wants to demonstrate that every principle in ethical life requires ethical life for its actuality, and he thinks

that the only way to do this is to begin with that which appears basic, simple, and minimal – the most abstract – and show that *even it* presupposes ethical life.³

Despite Hegel’s concern for completion, his method is, according to my reading, very modest in its ambitions, maybe too modest for some people’s philosophical tastes. As Alznauer points out, although the fact that a concept can be actualized under given circumstances is necessary for demonstrating its rationality, it is not sufficient for doing so. It might be actualizable given current conditions, but prove to be defective at a later stage of its development. This suggests that it is not possible for a philosophical account oriented toward that which is actual/rational to definitively demonstrate that its object is indeed actual/rational. To repeat, a principle might be actualizable *provisionally*, under present circumstances, without this thereby implying that it is “actual” in the sense of an adequate realization of its concept. Some things work for a while and reveal their deeper flaws only down the road.

Let me now turn to Moyar’s objection to my gloss on the *Doppelsatz*. He thinks that, while it is relatively uncontroversial to say that “actuality” is already a normative standard, I go too far in claiming that the *Doppelsatz* is trivially true because actuality and rationality are identical by definition. As he puts it, “Hegelian identity typically implies difference as well, so even the simplest seeming identity claims will turn out not be simple at all.” According to Moyar, even though to identify something as actual is to identify it as rational, actuality contains more than rationality, because it also contains what Hegel calls externality, “the contingent and messy appearances.” This suggests that it makes good sense to measure actuality by the standard of rationality, to consider some instances of actuality more rational than others, and hence to presuppose that there is a difference between the two. He also notes that this would make the version from the lectures, that “the rational becomes actual and the rational becomes actual,” coherent.

Moyar invokes Hegel’s reference to Plato to support this distinction, arguing that Hegel could not be crediting Plato with the appreciation of something that is trivially true. But I read the Plato reference differently. Hegel is not crediting Plato with the appreciation of the

³ Here I appeal to Horstmann’s explanation for Hegel’s procedure in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He argues that Hegel wants to demonstrate the “primacy of the maximally complex over the elementary simple” by revealing that it is presupposed by even in the *most* simple, hence the most abstract. See Rolf-Peter Horstmann, “The *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a ‘Transcendentalistic’ Argument for a Monistic Ontology,” in *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide*, ed. Dean Moyar and Michael Quante (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 42 – 62.

Doppelsatz per se, but with its implementation in his political philosophy, specifically in the *Republic*. In other words, it is not that Plato discovered that the actual is rational and vice versa, but that he discovered that his own ethical world is rational/actual, hence orienting himself toward that which is “immanent” and “eternal” in the present context. For Hegel this amounts in Plato’s case to an acknowledgement that a newly emerged principle (“free infinite personality”) needs to be given its fair due, which Plato attempts to do by granting it to the “philosopher-king,” even if he does not want to make it available to other citizens. So Hegel’s point is that Plato is not constructing an ideal state from his own individual cognitive resources, but employing principles that are already at work, even if not yet fully, in his social context.

I find Moyar’s way of differentiating actuality and rationality helpful because it emphasizes that, in order for something to count as actual, it will have to incorporate external elements as well. This I fully accept. But it is also important to avoid confusing “actuality” in the strict sense with the “ethical world” in all its contingent richness. And while the ethical world can be said to undergo a process of becoming rational, I maintain that it does not make sense to say that *actuality* is undergoing such a process.

What I am trying to resist is seeing Hegel’s method in the *Philosophy of Right* as one application. I do not want to say that the *Logic* tells us what the idea of the good consists in, and hence what our standard of rationality ought to be, which we can subsequently use in the evaluation of ethical actuality, considering some actualities more rational than others. Rather, it is a task of *finding* the appropriate standard in your object, in the ethical world that already exists. This is consistent with Hegel’s insistence that we should give up thinking of the concept as a measure for something that is external to it, but rather recognize the concept as the animating principle that is objectively manifest. In other words, Hegel’s method in the *Philosophy of Right* involves showing that the ethical world is not merely external, but has an actual core, even if it retains purely external aspects. And this will involve seeking a more determinate measure of the good, appropriate to the social world, than the one that the *Logic* itself can provide.

Moyar asks me how exactly I understand the relationship between the *Logic* and the *Philosophy of Right*, specifically, whether I want to say that the *Logic*, too, is ultimately grounded in history and hence the product of a developmental process, much like ethical life itself, or whether it is just that the account of the Idea in the *Logic* is too indeterminate to be of

much use to the *Philosophy of Right*. While I am not prepared to make the former claim, I am prepared to say that Hegel’s method cannot consist in determining, in an a priori way, the purely “logical” idea of the good and then moving on to *apply* this standard to actual ethical life, which lies outside it. This way of proceeding would in fact betray a misunderstanding of the “idea” as it is laid out in the *Logic*.

Critique, Religion, and Conscience

Last, I want to turn to another set of questions, beginning with Moyar’s challenge to my distinction between internal and immanent criticism, which I owe to Rahel Jaeggi.⁴ In the book I argue that there is a difference between criticizing a given practice for failing to measure up to the standard espoused by its participants (this would be internal criticism) and criticizing a practice *and* its standard for leading to unavoidable contradictions (this would be immanent criticism). While internal criticism is indeed a common and familiar form of social criticism, the worry is that it is not radical enough, because it keeps us confined to the standards that are already widely shared. So immanent criticism is supposed to explain how social participants are able to engage in more radical forms of criticism that put those very standards, and not just their enactment, into question. I employ this distinction in order to suggest that there is no reason to banish immanent criticism from ethical life, even if Hegel does not discuss it in this context. My two main examples of contradictions which would warrant its exercise are Hegel’s own conception of poverty as a necessary consequence of civil society, and racial segregation of schools in the United States. In short, immanent critique is supposed to be a social process of normative transformation that responds to such contradictions, even when those engaging in it do not conceive of the relevant problems as contradictions.

Moyar asks me whether immanent critique is an effective or desirable model, if it implies that such fundamental norms like the right of personhood and the freedom of moral subjectivity – which “have a bedrock status in the modern world” – might be put into question. Although I agree completely that there are some norms that Hegel does not think could ever come up for review, once they have historically developed, everything hinges on how we identify the relevant norm, or better yet, whether we are willing to distinguish the norm in abstraction from its

⁴ Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 190 – 208.

concrete interpretations. Take for example the norm of equality. While it is true that a model which tells us that equality as such could become legitimately abandoned would not be very attractive, it would be reasonable to suspect that we have not yet arrived at an incontestable interpretation of what equality in the social world concretely requires. So maybe the picture is more complicated than I suggested. There is not just the norm and its practical enactment, but the norm, its interpretation, and its practical enactment. I think that this set of distinctions can illuminate the way that Hegel understands immanent critique in the *Phenomenology*, in which freedom in some form or another remains a constant aspiration from one configuration to the next, though its interpretation becomes dramatically revised in the process.

Moyar also questions whether desegregation is indeed a good example of immanent criticism and I am grateful to him for giving me this opportunity to reconsider my use of it. What interested me about this example was the conceptual claim in the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, that “separate is *inherently* unequal,” which was made on the basis of the experience of segregation, including empirical evidence from psychological studies. I invoke it to illustrate how experience can challenge the compatibility of clusters of commitments. But as Moyar points out, there are reasons to think that desegregation might be better understood as an instance of internal criticism, since it involves demanding that the ideal of equality be more consistently enacted (and charging the defenders of “separate but equal” with a failure to recognize the value of equality).⁵ This suggests that maybe immanent and internal criticism are only neatly distinguishable as models. Once we are dealing with specific cases, it becomes harder to tell which of the two is at work.

I want to address Moyar’s welcome point that a reason against thinking that desegregation is a good example of immanent criticism is that the institution the ruling challenged was never extinguished. I define immanent critique as a social process. Through *Brown v. Board of Education* segregation may have lost its legal basis, but an actual process of desegregation never took place, at least not on a national scale. Many school districts, especially in the North, remain segregated to this day, despite the pressure exerted by activists of the Civil Rights movement. One way this has been captured is by saying that *Brown v. Board of*

⁵ I should note that immanent criticism does not presuppose that those whose practices are being criticized avow all of the relevant commitments. It is enough that *Brown v. Board of Education* exposed the contradiction at the heart of a society that is committed to equality and to segregation, even if those people who supported segregation were not “good-faith agents who honestly believed that equality was possible with segregation,” as Moyar puts it.

Education eliminated “de jure” segregation, not “de facto” segregation. But there have been those who have argued that this very distinction between “de jure” and “de facto” is highly misleading, since those who fought in favor of keeping schools segregated found other legal means for doing so, for example by redrawing school districts along racial lines.⁶

Moyar raises three further questions. First, he asks me why I use only the first part of the chapter on “Bildung” in the *Phenomenology*, when the later parts, specifically the conflict between Enlightenment and faith, would have been useful for my purposes. I decided to focus on the account of the emergence of “Bildung” as a configuration of spirit, prior to its evolution into the Enlightenment, because I wanted to foreground the structure of reflection that “Bildung” introduces and connect it to work and labor. But this structure is visible in many different contexts. So even though a focus on “Bildung” allowed me to thematize it as such, it could have been similarly well illustrated by subsequent developments.

Moyar suggests that there is a particular reason to think that the conflict between Enlightenment and faith ought to have been relevant to my project. The Enlightenment seeks to disabuse faith of its illusions by revealing that this block of wood is just a block of wood, this piece of bread-dough just a piece of bread-dough (PhG §552). In Moyar’s words, “Hegel criticizes this Enlightenment posture on the grounds that religion, and in particular religious practice, is not the kind of attitude about which a people can be deceived. The meaning that religion finds in its worship is immune to the attacks based on a theoretical stance, an appeal to natural science or to historical evidence.” Hegel’s way of putting it is to say that faithful people engage in double-perception: though they are fully aware that the objects they use in their religious rituals are just ordinary objects, they manage to simultaneously see them *as* embodiments of the divine (PhG §572). So telling them that these are just wood or dough is not informing them of something of which they were not already aware.

Moyar goes on to ask me whether Hegel, as I read him, wants to save the truth of religion from excessive reflection, and whether this extends to religious traditions beyond Protestant Christianity, which is supposed to have overcome the contradiction contained in the above-mentioned double-perception. This is a great question, to which I cannot do justice here. What makes it especially tricky is that religion is both at once – a practice in which people for the most

⁶ See Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018) for a historical treatment of these issues.

part unreflectively participate, and itself a form of reflection, one manifestation of what Hegel calls “Absolute Spirit.” I suspect that Hegel would say that religion permits a kind of reflection on ethical life, a reflection akin to that permitted by art. Participating in religious rituals and frequenting a museum are both distinctly *reflective* practices, because they usually require assuming a stance different from that of daily life. But Hegel is of course worried that religion will come to interfere with daily life, specifically with the patriotism manifest in what he describes as a free obedience of the law.

In a lengthy remark to PR §270, Hegel raises a number of concerns about the religious attitude in the context of ethical life. One is that it will dismiss all mundane forms of patriotism as “worldly matters” that pale in comparison to its serious devotion. Another is that it will conflict with the dictates of the state, holding itself to be an independent (and infallible) source of authority in worldly matters. This could lead to religious fanaticism, an obstinate refusal to listen to anyone except the religious leader, or one’s supposed “heart.” So Hegel is clearly worried about the role of religion in ethical life. But he admits that these are all perversions of the religious attitude, which is in principle compatible with that required for social participation. He even suggests that, because religion can help integrate individuals into the state, the state ought to demand that its citizens belong to some religious community or another, though it cannot dictate which one.

What I find most interesting about his discussion of religion is that Hegel considers the rise in religiosity to be symptomatic of a social problem. He notes that “people recommend and resort to religion above all in times of public distress, disruption, and oppression, and that they are referred to it for consolation in the face of wrong and for hope as a compensation for loss” (PR §270R). The religious attitude is here being identified as a *symptom* of public distress, disruption, and oppression. In this respect it seems to be similar to *conscience*, which Hegel also describes as indicative that “the existing world of freedom has become unfaithful to the better will” (PR §138R). His idea is that explicit appeals to one’s own conscience are a bad sign for the time in which they are made.

This brings me to the third of Moyar’s questions, with which I want to conclude. Moyar considers my dismissal of conscience as “not a full-fledged perspective” to be a missed opportunity. According to Moyar, “morality and conscience could play a greater role in uniting ordinary practice and philosophical knowledge than [I accord] them, and could in fact be enlisted

to support key elements of [my] reading.” What he suggests is that the morality chapter offers a rather abstract conception of the good as the unity of welfare and right, which already gives us an “all-inclusive concept of freedom,” but does not yet offer determinate guidance for action. Conscience is supposed to provide this guidance, because it actualizes the good so conceived.

I suspect that my disagreement with Moyar’s conception of conscience does not run very deep, that it might even be primarily terminology, as he himself suggests.⁷ Moyar claims that conscience actualizes the good, whereas I would say that it is the ethical disposition (which Hegel identifies as *true* conscience) that actualizes the good. And the ethical disposition, as I understand it, consists in the convictions one has about what is good, which one expresses in habitual conduct. So I also want to emphasize the role of individual agency in *actualizing* the good by pursuing what one takes to be good, what one is convinced is good, which is likewise a process of *determining* the good by implementing it in specific circumstances. But I am reluctant to call this point of view that of “conscience,” mainly because Hegel suggests that conscience in any other guise is at best the symptom of a problem that it lacks the resources to resolve.

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⁷ There are some respects in which I would depart from his conception. For example, Moyar claims that conscience “cannot be an original source of norms, but it can be a source for transforming, through processes of negation, the existing norms. It is an activity of liberation rather than the basis for a construction from the ground up of a society’s ethical norms.” Dean Moyar, *Hegel’s Conscience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30. So he ascribes more critical potential to conscience than I would. But I am open to his suggestion that Hegel’s identification of conscience and absolute knowing, which I did not explore in the book, could be fruitful for understanding the relationship of philosophy to the ordinary point of view.

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Theoharis, Jeanne. *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2018.